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DSD - ISSUE 04

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Written by Terry Nation
(Doctor Who, Blake's 7)

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giant, Talos, come to life in *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) was one of the most memorable movie experiences of my young lifetime. It really filled me with awe at the time, still does, come to think of it.

Tom Hanks obviously feels the same about the movie. When presenting Ray with the Gordon E. Sawyer Award in 1992 for "technological contributions which have brought credit to the industry", Hanks told the audience, "Some people say *Casablanca* or *Citizen Kane*... I say *Jason and the Argonauts* is the greatest film ever made!"

I got the chance to meet Ray back in 1992/3 when I went to visit him at his huge Knightsbridge mansion and found him to be an amiable, soft spoken guy, a bit old fashioned in his attitudes – he said that he and his wife walked out of *Silence of the Lambs* because it was too gory. God knows what they made of the *Hostel* and *Saw* films!

Jurassic Park had been, or was just about to be released at the time and Ray was full of praise for the computer-generated special effects dinosaurs. He could see that was the way

the effects world was heading, and his kind of movie magic was going, well, the way of the dinosaur. Today's computer technicians may be brilliant at what they do but Ray was an artist, a craftsman who could breathe life and personality into a snake-haired Gorgon or a troop of skeleton soldiers.

The 1933 *King Kong* was the film that gave Ray his own epiphany moment at the age of 13. He later started making his own models and befriended Willis O'Brien, Kong's special effects director, later becoming his assistant on *Mighty Joe Young* (1942), for which O'Brien won an Oscar.

Ray's most successful partnership over the years – apart from his 50-year marriage to his wife Diane, who survives him – was with the American producer Charles H. Schnee. Their first collaboration was the 1955 *It Came From Beneath The Sea*, a movie about a giant octopus. The budget was so low that they could only afford for the monster to have six tentacles.

The two men would work together for the next 26 years, in the process giving us such timeless fantasies as *Earth Vs The Flying Saucers* (1956), *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (1958) *Mysterious Island* (1961), and *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963). Harryhausen and Schnee created a new way of matting together foreground and background footage, calling it Dynamation, or SuperDynamation to make it sound even more special.

Ray's final effects movie was *Clash of the Titans* (1981), after which he retired gracefully, occasionally popping up in cameos in movies for mates like John Landis, such as *Spies Like Us* (1985), *Beverly Hills Cop III* (1994) and *Burke and Hare* (2010). He had a walk-on part in *Mighty Joe* (1998), for obvious reasons, and supplied the voice for a Polar Bear cub in *Elf* (1998). Pixar later paid tribute to him in *Monsters, Inc* (2001), with the main characters eating at Harryhausen's, a fashionable sushi restaurant.

Allan Bryce

Hi there folks and welcome to a somewhat slimmed down *Dark Side Digital* issue. The reason that we decided to change the digi mag to this smaller size was basically so we could produce it more cheaply and give it away for free, thus maximising our reader base. Before you ask, no, we won't be doing the same with the print issue!

I'm actually getting very excited about the print mag now. We recently signed a deal to get *The Dark Side* into more W.H. Smith shops than ever and at the same time added a chain of 100 more Northern-based outlets via a respected distributor called Rippleglen. Slowly but surely we are increasing our sales every issue at a time when many print mags are doing the opposite.

What's going to help us even more is increasing the coverage of the kind of stuff you all want to read about. The next issue of *The Dark Side* sees some classic retro material with the concluding part of Denis Meikle's epic Oliver Reed feature and another fine piece from Denis on the history of *Dracula AD 72* – represented in a fine cover painting by our resident Van Gogh (what we ask him to do goes in one ear and straight out the same ear), Rick Melton.

We've also got an interview with 70s sex kitten Francoise Pascal (*Burke and Hare*, *Mind Your Language*), and guess who conducted it? OK, I'll tell you. None other than Mr. John Martin himself. Yes, he's back, and this time it's personal. Expect the usual off-colour remarks and lots of name dropping like, "So Lucio and I were having a beer and a vindaloo, and he said to me, 'John, your beard is even more luxurious than Al Cliver's in my movie, *Zombie Flesh-Eaters*. You also have a better body for scuba diving than Aurette Gay...'" Yes, we've all missed him.

Was very sad to hear of the death of Ray Harryhausen recently, at the grand old age of 92. He truly was one of the greats, well, the greatest ever in the stop-motion animation field. Seeing his bronze



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THE MAKING OF PSYCHO

Psycho is arguably Hitchcock's most famous film and yet it almost never got made, as Simon Hooper reports...

In November 1957, reclusive Wisconsin odd job man Ed Gein was visited by police concerned about his welfare. They discovered a horrific sight. Gein's interest in human biology had manifested itself in a collection of female heads. Four female faces in full make up were pinned to the wall, and five others were found in a bag. There was a bowl made from a skull, a vest, leggings, purse and bracelets made from human skin, a pot of human noses, a pair of lips hanging by a string from the ceiling and armchairs upholstered with human flesh.

Well, everybody has to have a hobby!

This was only the start of it. Police went on to find a naked, headless, disembowelled female strung up by her heels in Ed's shed. A nearby freezer was stocked with human organs and a pan on the hob contained a human heart. Things like this just did not happen in small town America, and unlike today (where lunatic serial killers are leered over by the tabloid press) the horror and depravity of it all was played down.

It barely made a small paragraph in a local newspaper, but that was read by author Robert Bloch, a protégé of the horror writer H.P. Lovecraft. The real life story fired up Bloch's imagination and he began work on what was to be the novel, *Psycho*.

Six weeks later he handed the manuscript to his agent who in turn forwarded it to Harper & Row. They immediately rejected it, but it was snapped up by another publisher, Simon & Schuster, for a book series that they ran.

Once published, the book started doing the rounds at the film studios in early 1959. But nobody was rushing to buy the rights. Deemed both repulsive and shocking, it was thought to be impossible to film. Then MCA, under Lew Wasserman, put in a blind bid of \$7,500, eventually securing the rights for \$9,000. In retrospect it was a pitiful payday for the author, what with 10% going to his agent and a further 15% to the publisher. Things didn't get any better when Bloch saw that under his punitive contract there was a clause that he would receive no back end percentage if the book was sold to Hollywood.

Enter Alfred Hitchcock, who was earning around a quarter of a million dollars per film as well as a percentage of the box office gross.

After initially working at Warners Hitchcock had been with Universal since 1953, and his contract gave him carte blanche to make whatever he liked, as long as it was budgeted at under \$3m.

Throughout the 1950's, Hitchcock had been making a film every year, sometimes two, and he strived not to repeat himself. With 1959's *North by Northwest* in release he was now on a quest for his next film.

He had planned to make *Flamingo Feather*, an African-based diamond adventure, but that project collapsed because the writer failed to deliver a script. Also falling by the wayside was *No Bail For The Judge*, about a lawyer defending her father, who was accused of murdering a prostitute.

This was to star Audrey Hepburn but went into turnaround partly due to the UK at the time having a huge crack down on street prostitution.

Hitchcock had established a phenomenal reputation but was now feeling the heat from the competition. Other directors were encroaching on his territory, notably Henri-Georges Clouzot with 1954's *Les Diaboliques*, a stunning suspense film which had been widely described as 'Hitchcockian'.

Equally irksome to Hitchcock was the salaries that film stars could now command pushing up movie budgets to a new high level.

Never comfortable with strangers, Hitch had evolved a film 'family' over the years the inner sanctum of which was comprised of three women: His wife Alma, Peggy Robertson, his P.A since 1949 and Joan Harrison a former screenwriter and producer; it was she who read

scripts, books, magazines, newspapers, cuttings and just about anything for stories that might be suitable.

In one year alone she vetted 2400 submissions, of which only 30 were deemed appropriate for the director. *Psycho* was one of them, and bore some similarity with *Les Diaboliques*. Both had a

murder in the bathroom, both had a twisty shock ending.

Hammer studios were of interest to Hitch at the time. The profit being made by their low budget horror films was impressive and the director knew if he could replicate the Hammer business model and keep the star salaries in check he could be rewarded with a big financial success.

In June 1959 Hitchcock met with Paramount executives to tell them that *Psycho* would be his next feature and the final production of his five film contract with them. Their reaction was not what he was expecting. Paramount hated it, and in an effort to put him off the project they said that there would be no budget for stars and he would have to film it in black and white.

Silently fuming at Paramount's stance, Hitchcock began thinking about shooting the movie on an even smaller budget. At the time his TV series had been running for a few years and was doing very well. He wondered if *Psycho* could be budgeted the same way. He knew his TV crew were used to working quickly and a swift 36 day shoot could be achieved on a budget of only \$800,000, about 4 times the cost of a TV episode.

There now began a game of brinkmanship between studio and director. Paramount, concerned at that their final Hitchcock contract picture was going to be a repellent little shocker, began to make things awkward, telling him there were no soundstages available during the time he intended to shoot. This was far from the truth, as at the time there was a notable slump in production.

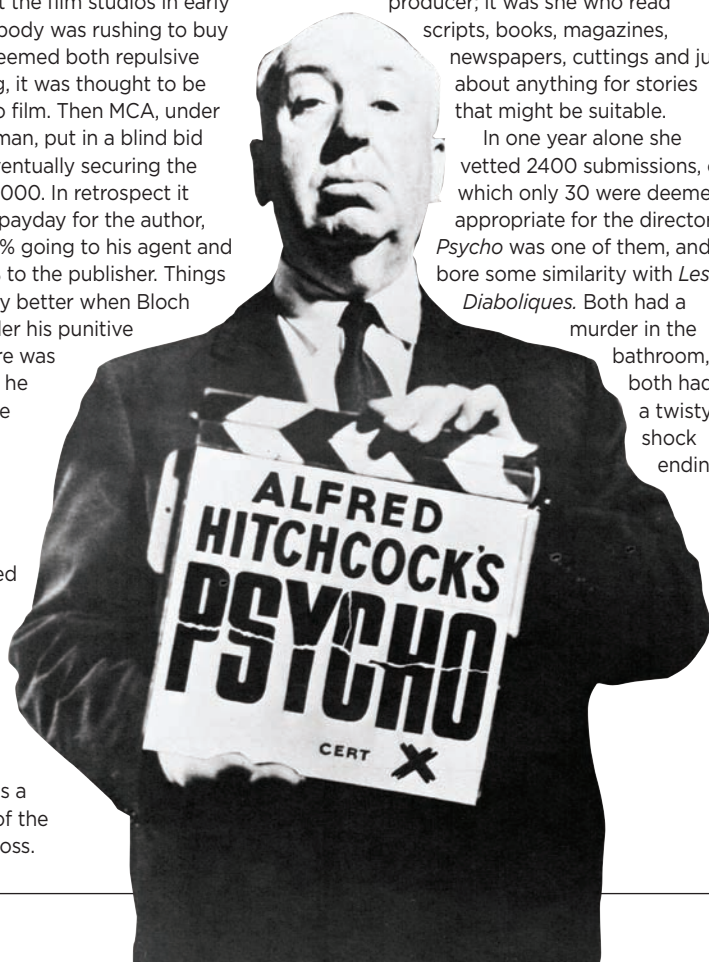
In a bid to outmanoeuvre them, Hitchcock called their bluff, telling Paramount he would finance *Psycho* himself. At the time MCA President Lew Wasserman, whose company owned Universal, suggested that the famed director might like to make his film on their back lot. Hitchcock negotiated a deal where he could shoot the film at Universal while Paramount could distribute it. As he was the only producer, he also agreed to defer his \$250,000 fee for directing in exchange for 60% of the profits.

Paramount readily agreed. They regarded this tawdry little film as being a guaranteed flop, thinking the director would consequently take a huge financial hit. It was a deal they couldn't refuse.

Paramount weren't alone in disliking the project. Herbert Coleman, who'd worked with Hitch as a 2nd unit director on all his films since *Rear Window*, was so concerned about the subject matter he withdrew from working on the film.

Even Hitch's trusty assistant Joan Harrison was now beginning to think that the film's subject matter was too grim.

In the past, Hitch had taken books and reworked them quite extensively, but here the film's plot was almost identical to the book, the biggest difference being that the Norman Bates in the novel was a plump, porn addicted, booze-fuelled classical music fan. In the film he would be a vastly





Above: Canny publicity for *Psycho* helped turn it into a box office sensation.

different character.

Robert Bloch had been considered to write the screenplay but proved to be 'unavailable', though he later said he was never asked. It was Joan Harrison who suggested writer James P Cavanagh, who had worked on his TV shows. He duly wrote a draft, but Hitch paid him off almost immediately, deeming it 'too TV'.

Lew Wasserman instructed the MCA agents to suggest 38-year-old Joseph Stefano, a lyricist who was making inroads into screenwriting. Hitch rejected Stefano based on what he knew of his previous work, but Wasserman was persistent.

Stefano himself was not too enamoured with the material, hating the idea of a 40-something drunk peeping through holes in walls. But then Hitchcock threw him the idea of casting Anthony Perkins, a matinee idol with bobbysoxers at the time, as Bates.

It was enough for him to see the project in a different light and Stefano started pitching ideas back. His most notable initial suggestion was staging an opening afternoon love scene between a female character and her lover in a hotel bedroom.

Hitch's revelled in breaking taboos and knew that such a salacious idea would shock an uptight country. He hired Stefano on a weekly basis to start writing. By all accounts Hitch was an exasperating collaborator when it came to getting a script the way he wanted it, on scripts, but Stefano (who himself was seeing a psychoanalyst at the time) worked fast, finishing in just 3 weeks. In October 1959 he handed over the first draft.

Paramount now upped the ante. Having told Hitch that there were no available studios on their lot, they now said they wouldn't allow him to shoot there at all. Fortunately Hitchcock's TV production company, Shamley Productions, named after a holiday home he'd bought, were based at Universal and so he went there to shoot the film with his TV crew.

By now the title of Hitchcock's next movie had leaked to the press, with many believing it was some sort of Greek tragedy. More problematic was that the

director Sam Fuller had registered the title for himself, but the MPAA supported Hitchcock and decided in his favour.

The director started gathering his favoured collaborators together, including the fastidious composer Bernard Herrman, who he asked to do the score for union scale rate. Miffed at the lowly offer, Herrman refused and held out for his normal rate which he eventually got.

Hitchcock's regular production designer Robert Boyle (*North by Northwest*) and art director Henry Bumstead were too costly and so Hitch hired Joseph Hurley, an illustrator and art director. As this was his first feature film Hurley had wanted to work with Robert Clatworthy and Hitch relented to his request realising that he's get two good designers for half the cost of Boyle or Bumstead.

Anthony Perkins owed Paramount a film and was paid \$40,000 for the lead role. For him it was a huge gamble being far different than his usual matinee idol parts. Casting the doomed Marion Crane was more difficult. Here was a character who got killed off early on, but many actresses still wanted to work for Hitchcock. Piper Laurie, Hope Lange and even Lana Turner were considered before Janet Leigh secured the role. But it was Vera Miles who was to be at the receiving end of the director's spite. She had signed to a 5 year contract with the controlling Hitchcock, but since first appearing in *The Wrong Man* for him in 1956 their relationship had been deteriorating.

Miles had been lined up to play the lead in *Vertigo* as a blonde, but became pregnant, much to his disdain. It was to be her third child and it is rumoured that Hitch unkindly told her no one should have more than two!

Psycho was his chance to get his own back after what he regarded as a personal snub on *Vertigo*. Miles' role was underwritten, perhaps deliberately so, there only to explain plot mechanisms. Having had her head shaved for *Five Branded Women*, the actress found herself having to wear a wig for the film and dressed in the same dowdy apparel for

the entire shoot. Her barely concealed fury rumbled throughout the whole film.

The part of Sam Loomis was at various stages offered to Jack Lord (*Hawaii Five-O*) and even Leslie Neilson who at the time was more known for his straight acting than his later comedic genius. Eventually John Gavin secured the role with the highest salary of the cast. At the other end of the pay scale was the director's own daughter Patricia Hitchcock, who'd appeared first in her dad's *Stage Fright*. Keeping costs low he paid his daughter a nominal fee for her role.

The start of a lengthy campaign to keep the ending secret began with Hitch announcing to the press that Helen Hayes was to play the part of mother.

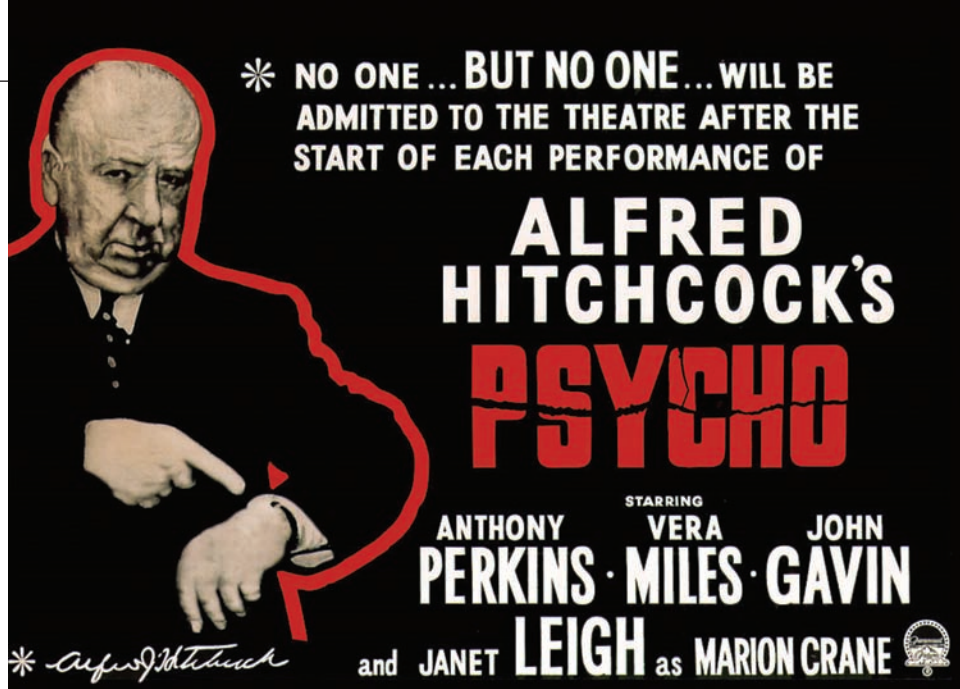
By mid November the finished script was sent to the MPAA for its seal of approval, crucial in gaining a nationwide cinema release.

Geoffrey Surlock, at the time the lead administrator there, warned Hitchcock that the script was almost bound to attract trouble from the Legion of Decency who would inevitably picket cinemas exhibiting it. The MPAA expressed other concerns but passed the script, 'subject to seeing the product', effectively meaning, 'Spend money making it and then we'll decide if we'll cut or ban it!'

Researchers at the studio found that there was already a Mary Crane living in Phoenix which necessitated a character name change to Marion Crane and with that done, on November 30th, 1959 the shoot began.

In keeping with the secretive nature of the film it was known as *Wimpy* on the backlot. The deception went as far as setting aside a chair with 'Mrs Bates' written across the back, which Hitch famously posed in for a publicity shot.

With his own money financing the film the stakes were high for Hitchcock, but he approached the filming in his usual meticulous style, pre-planning and storyboarded the entire project to the extent that the shooting of it became a mere but bothersome formality. The crew, used to quick shoots for television, were





averaging 15 set ups a day with only 3 – 4 takes. Hitchcock was confident of getting it all done and would come onto the set, chat to the crew, tell jokes and anecdotes before mid morning when he was ready to start. Before long it was time to film arguably the most famous scene ever committed to celluloid: the murder in the shower. Containing both violence and nudity Hitchcock knew that this would cause him problems with the censor. Saul Bass, the highly regarded graphic designer who created many of the stylish opening sequences for Hitch's films, had storyboarded the 45 second scene. It would comprise 78 set ups and take seven days to shoot.

In early December, Bass had shot test footage on an old newsreel camera to see how it cut together and a four walled set was built, including a shower and bath that could be detached. Leigh had been uncomfortable shooting the film's opening scene wearing just a white bra as she thought her breasts were too big, and at first she refused to do the nudity required for the shower scene. Eventually, however, she did relent, wearing strategically glued moleskin patches in some insert shots. Out of necessity a showgirl/burlesque stripper was hired as a body double. She was quite at home being naked and often sat around like this when she was unable to wear a bathrobe because of the make up.

In the final film, all that we really see of Janet Leigh is her head, shoulders and hands. The rest is the model, and the hand with the knife is the director's. Anthony Perkins on the other hand was in New York rehearsing a play while the scene was being filmed and the silhouette in the film is clearly not him. This caused a slight problem. Hitch had insisted on pristine

shiny white tiles for the set, but they reflected light onto the face of 24-year-old stuntwoman Margo Epper, who played mother in the scene, so she had to be backlit instead. This was only one of a number of technical challenges that Hitch enjoyed solving. The shot looking directly at the shower head spouting water was solved by shooting on a long lens and blocking the inner holes – the crew got soaked but the lens stayed dry.

Hitchcock asked one of the prop men to bring a selection of melons to set and closed his eyes to listen to the prop man stabbing them before deciding on which one made the best sound.

But it was the final shot that was his biggest challenge. Here the camera tracks and pans from a big close up of Leigh's eye out of the bathroom into the bedroom and to the silhouette of Bates' house as he runs out, shocked at what mother has done.

The original intention was to fit Leigh with a contact lens which she would have to wear for several weeks prior to the scene to acclimatise, but this was quickly abandoned when the optician told her that she might suffer eye damage. Instead, in post production, the dissolve from plughole to eye was matched in size by an optical process. What was to be a continuous shot took dozens and dozens of takes, and ultimately the one continuous shot was made up of three elements.

The first is the shot from eye to door frame, where there's a barely noticeable mix to the next shot from door frame to the bedroom, then to the look out of the window to the house.

The house was on a different set altogether and what you actually see out of the window is back projection, which had to be carefully timed so the shot



Above: Janet Leigh studies her script on the loo, and Hitch chats on set with Anthony Perkins.

ended on the house just as Norman ran down the steps. The brilliantly conceived scene eventually ended up taking 11 days to shoot and many of the crew thought Hitch had gone too far in his perfectionism, putting the production four days behind schedule. The problem continued in the cutting room, because it was here that his indispensable 'right hand man', wife Alma, spotted a problem. She noticed Leigh blink. They ran it again and again and there it was – a clear blink and you miss it, blink. In the movie it was covered up by a cutaway to the shower head before cutting back to Leigh again and the long continuous take.

But who actually directed the scene? By the age of 39, Saul Bass had designed many title sequences a lot of which were far better than the films they appeared on, and it was his burgeoning reputation in this field that instigated Hitchcock to hire him. His input is undeniable but the director never publicly acknowledged Bass' contribution to the shower scene and perhaps this is the reason why in 1973 in *The Sunday Times* Bass claimed to have directed it. Even the mighty *Halliwel's Film Guide* lists him as being the director.

Perhaps it is because he storyboarded the sequence under the director's tutelage that led Bass to believe this. The truth is that none of the crew or stars recall Bass even being on set that week and it was Hitchcock and Hitchcock alone who directed the scene in the studio.

But the murder of Martin Balsam's Detective Arbogast on the stairs was a different matter altogether.

Technically this was a challenging scene. Balsam was a good actor and one whom Hitchcock admired greatly, and his first interrogation of Perkins sparked with

Right:
Anthony Perkins and his stuffed animals, chatting with Janet Leigh and playing Peeping Tom,

nervous energy. Having endured John Gavin, who he referred to as 'the Stiff', Hitchcock now relished directing Perkins and Balsam, but their staccato overtalking caused editor George Tomasini a headache when it came to cutting the scene together.

The later scene where Arbogast gets stabbed on the stairs was again carefully storyboarded by Saul Bass, who put emphasis on Balsam's feet and hands as he climbed the stairs. Hitchcock chided him for this, arguing that it made Arbogast's actions seem suspicious. The scene involved a challenging God's eye crane shot of Arbogast at the top of the stairs as mother comes out of the bedroom. Cranes were not as versatile then as they are today and the one used was only big enough for a single cameraman who would have to pull focus as well as operate.

To prepare, the crew ran technical rehearsals at the end of each day for a week. Again in an attempt to confuse the audience, mother was played by a small woman to maintain the illusion. On the day designated for the scene, disaster struck - Hitchcock was hit by flu and unable to attend the set. But knowing that time was tight and that it had all been rehearsed, he gave the go-ahead to assistant director Hilton Green to film without him, albeit with Hitch on the end of the phone. The crew went on to shoot close ups of hands on banisters but Hitch had them redone. With Balsam having been stabbed it, left only the shot of him falling back down the stairs - which was achieved with Balsam sitting in a gimbal, his arms and legs flailing about against a back projection of the stairs/hallway.

With Hitchcock back to health they continued shooting the scene at the swamp where Bates disposes of Leigh's car. The location was a bland backlot set where the car, which was attached to a hydraulic device, was to be dumped in the swamp's murky waters. With the schedule so tight they had to get it right first time, as any retakes would mean the car having to be cleaned up. Throughout the shoot Hitchcock's macabre humour had been played out mostly on Janet Leigh. She would frequently find different model corpses of 'mother' in her dressing room and her reaction was one on which he would base his choice for the final dummy to be used in the cellar scene.

Much research had gone into the physical condition of such a corpse and various gruesome suggestions were made, including one where maggots were seen crawling in the eye sockets. These were ultimately dismissed by the director as the corpse was an old and dried out rather than 'fresh'.

The shoot was now almost at an end, with just the denouement to be completed. In the script the explanation for Bates' behaviour was to begin outside the courthouse with a reporter, but this was cut and starts as we see it now in the film. The end shot of the film, with Perkins sat on a chair in the middle of a room - a shot which Saul Bass originally based on the



famous painting of Whistlers Mother - left Hitchcock in a rare moment of indecision.

Even now there are two slightly different endings. Some prints have Perkins staring at us as a skull is momentarily superimposed over his face as he smirks at us - other prints don't.

The whole scene was shot with the assistance of Perkins' friend, Paul Jasmin, a little known actor who for amusement used to make prank calls to other actors whilst affecting an old woman's voice. It

was Perkins who gave a tape of one of the calls to the director. He loved the voice and asked Jasmin to read mother's lines off camera when they shot the final scene.

Apart from Jasmin, Mother's voice in the film is actually a composite of several actors, including Jeanette Nolan and Virginia Gregg, who continued to supply the voice in the underrated sequel in 1983 and the frankly lamentable third installment in 1986.

The infamous six minute trailer of



Left:
The famed
shower murder
which some
say was
directed by
Saul Bass. We
very much
doubt it.

Hitchcock doing his tour of the motel was the final sequence to be shot, and production was now at an end, nine days over schedule but narrowly avoiding an impending actor's strike. With the film being paid for out of the director's pocket there was no traditional wrap party.

Inevitably, the rough cut shown to executives on April 26th 1960 appalled them. But regardless of their inevitable reaction he knew something wasn't quite right with the film. The music. Or lack of it. Its release was getting nearer and Hitchcock was starting to get edgy. Originally he'd thought of not having music at all, as was the case with his earlier *Lifeboat*. But knew that it was needed and at one point was bizarrely even thinking about a jazz score. It was Bernard Herrman who came up with the idea of the shrieking strings arrangement. It was a masterstroke.

Herrman had scored five films for Hitchcock previously but this so pleased the director he doubled Herrman's salary. The second screening for the executives was much more successful although they still didn't like it.

This only left the censors to deal with. They came. They saw. They went mental. There were so many issues but it was the shower scene which topped the list. Some saw nudity, others didn't. Hitchcock, knowing he had to pacify them, agreed to re edit the film. Promptly returning to the cutting room he proceeded to make no changes whatsoever before resubmitting it. Now those who had seen nudity, didn't and those who hadn't seen nudity now did. This went on for a week, much to Hitchcock's amusement. The final cut of the shower murder upset writer Stefano too. In his script he had outlined a shot of Leigh's lifeless body collapsed over the edge of the bath, which was not in the final cut. Stefano regarded this shot as essential to emphasise the pointless waste of a life, but in an effort to placate him Hitchcock said that it was necessary for the censors to be appeased.

The games went on with the opening scene too, where Leigh is stripped to the waist sitting on a bed wearing a white bra (symbolically she wears a black bra after the money is stolen) having a post coital chat on a sunny afternoon. Outrageous.

To the MPAA, people simply didn't indulge in this sort of behaviour, so Hitchcock fully agreed to completely reshoot the opening if the censors would attend to assist to advise on anything that would be unacceptable. The crew sat around all day waiting for them, but they didn't turn up. Having survived the US censors the film had several minor cuts made for the international market (a shot of Perkins looking at his bloodied hands was cut from the UK version).

\$806,947 later, the film was complete and ready to show. But how do you promote a film which has no stars and no flashy expensive production values? What it did have was its title, the shock ending and Hitchcock himself. At the time, films were projected constantly and



Above: Norman's Mum has seen better days. But she can still run a motel and exert quite an influence on her little lad



people came and went as they pleased throughout the day, but *Psycho's* ending was everything and in New York they tried out a policy of not admitting anyone after the film had started. If it worked they would roll it out nationwide. It was a policy not dissimilar to one that they had tried with *Vertigo* two years previously.

The campaign was further ramped up when Hitchcock sent exhibitors a twenty page manual instructing them to hire guards to keep queues in order and to prevent people from entering the film late, an order form for clocks to remind audiences of the start time and even life size cut outs of himself with recorded messages playing out in the foyer. Publicity shots of Perkins, hand over mouth aghast at what he'd seen, were used as well as those of Leigh and Gavin half dressed, to stoke interest. On June 16 1960 *Psycho* opened in two cinemas in New York. Aware of what a hot potato the film could turn out to be, Lew Wasserman advised Hitch to release it in as many cinemas as possible after the New York opening, as that way they had a couple of weeks to hopefully break even with the loyal Hitchcock fans. It

was Wasserman who had initiated a profit sharing deal with James Stewart in 1950, and ironically the idea of stars being so well remunerated was a similar deal from which Hitchcock would benefit. Paramount hated the script and believed the film to be an inevitable flop, so they were fine with the initial contract. All parties were soon to find who, if anyone, was to benefit.

The ending was everything, and great pains had been made to keep it so. This had worked admirably, apart from Lurene Tuttle, who played the wife of the sheriff, blurting out to a local journalist that Perkins had spent much of the film dressed as his own mother. Luckily few read it and those who did didn't put two and two together. The reviews were savage, mostly from critics affronted that there had been no previews and that they'd had to watch it with the public. It made no difference. On June 22nd as *Psycho* opened nationwide, the queues began early in the morning and those that did see it were not giving the game away. The publicity was boosted by reports of audiences working themselves into a frenzy and fainting in the aisles. Drive-in's were gridlocked, boycotts were

made, people stormed out disgusted, psychiatrists wanted it banned yet people were now making repeat visits.

Paramount, realising they had a substantial hit on their hands, now started actively promoting it. Janet Leigh deliberately stayed away from screenings, fearing her presence might dilute the film's impact. For Hitchcock it was a pleasant surprise if not a shock that the film was finding such a massive audience. For the 60-year-old Hitchcock, *Psycho's* success far outstripped any expectation he'd ever had. In the past he'd made excellent films which had not performed well at the box office, but his low budget shocker had proved a box office bonanza. It was, over the coming years, to garner increasing acclaim, mainly fuelled by French theorists led by Francois Truffaut. The film had put the book into the shade, when in fact the film followed the identical plot even down to the last line being the same ('I wouldn't even harm a fly'). In fairness to Hitch, he credited the book far more than the screenwriter Stefano, saying that he had only written the dialogue. By the end of the year Hitchcock had personally earned more than \$15m from *Psycho*. Not bad for a film where ticket prices at the time were less than a dollar.

Wasserman managed to sign Hitchcock to Universal for 5 films and in 1962 Hitchcock was to become even wealthier when he exchanged the rights to *Psycho* and his TV series for shares in MCA, Universal's parent company instantly making him the third largest shareholder overnight.

Award season came round, with the film nominated for Academy Awards for DoP John L Russell and Janet Leigh. Hitchcock was appalled that Perkins, who is excellent in his career-defining role, and Herrman, for his hair on end music were overlooked. Hitchcock himself was also to be nominated for the fifth and last time in his life for directing.

Having been nominated for *Rebecca*, *Lifeboat*, *Spellbound* and *Rear Window*, the time was right for the Academy to make amends. But the movie which had so disgusted the studios lost out to Billy Wilder's *The Apartment* - a comedy about a man pimping out his flat for extra marital affairs. For Hitchcock *Psycho* was to be the culmination of his career both critically and financially. It would be 20 years before he would be awarded an Oscar (for lifetime achievement) and knighted by the Queen, but by then he was at death's door. Up until then his films had been well crafted thrillers, but *Psycho* was an out and out shocker which ushered in an era of increasingly more sensational horror movies.

It would be three years before he made another film. But how could he follow *Psycho*? How could he ruffle feathers again?

For Hitchcock's making of *The Birds* see *Dark Side Digital Issue 2*.

Hitchcock is available on DVD/Blu Ray on June 17th.

DVD

LIBRARY

The latest genre-related DVD and Blu-ray releases reviewed by the redoubtable **James Kloda**



EVIL DEAD II (1987) Blu-ray and DVD

Out Now. StudioCanal Certificate: 15 84 minutes.

A 'fake shemp' is someone who appears in a movie in lieu of another actor, either disguised by make-up or filmed strategically. A replacement or body double. The term was coined after one of The Three Stooges, Shemp Howard, died suddenly, leaving Moe and Larry under contractual obligation to deliver four more shorts without him. Avid enthusiast of that anarchic troupe Sam Raimi credits a number of fake shemps in his comic-splatter-book masterpiece *Evil Dead II: Dead By Dawn*, the most obvious being the one with back to camera as hapless hero Ash is attacked by his own reflection.

But the character of Ash himself is a cheeky stand-in: patently killed off at the end of 1981's original, there is no continuation of narrative, the sequel riffing off its predecessor, albeit in gloriously bigger, gruesomely zanier proportion.

The first half hour is a hand-wringing, side-splitting one-man vaudeville show, and Bruce Campbell would doubtless have prayed for a few more fake shemps to help him out, such is the impish endurance test that his director drags him through. Ash is tormented and tortured by his own bewitched hand, headless zombie fiancée and an unrelenting growling Steadicam: Campbell is strapped in front of a camera-crane and spun round to be battered by branches, required to beat himself up, and slathered with all manner of garish fluid. Take after take. In true slapstick fashion, each small victory is punished by a ruthless physical gag: having shot his errant, mischievous hand, Ash's triumph is drowned in tsunamis of blood that gush out of the bullet holes he created. Never has watching someone suffer been so enjoyable: as the whole cabin fiendishly laughs at Ash's helplessness, Campbell breaks down into maniacal laughter. If you can't beat them, join them.

Which is what the titular cadavers demand throughout the rest of the film, stirred by the arrival of four others to this hallowed spot in the woods. Rapey trees, milky-eyed possession, zombies saggy with diseased flesh: the ante of *The Evil Dead* is deliriously upped through a breathless combination of unbridled innovation, restless imagination and arch cruelty. Perhaps slyly conceived as a heavily made-up fake shemp to the original, *Dead By Dawn* proves to be the real surreal deal.

Extras: Enough to make you dead by dawn if taken in their entirety: feature-length making-of, covering every aspect of production, particularly good on revealing how they achieved much of the remarkable camera work. However, it is puzzling that Raimi is absent- it would have been interesting to hear him respond to actress Sarah Berry's confession that Campbell "was definitely tortured, but was so disciplined"; 'The Road To Wadesboro', featurette revisiting the locations with props master Tony Elwood, who further admits that the shoot was painful for all; the excellent 'The Gore The Merrier', where the special effects maestros that comprise KNB discuss their work over extensive video footage that Greg Nicotero shot on set, ending with an 'Evil Dead Baby' short that the guys filmed for fun; 'Cabin Fever', which is a collection of that footage without narration- a little overkill, but it does have the only evidence of deleted scenes including Campbell wrestling with his fiancée's demonic tongue and zombie Ash eating a squirrel; Laserdisc commentary with Raimi, Campbell, Nicotero and co-writer Scott Spiegel, which is good on banter, but does reveal the nasty streak that the director has toward his actor. The high-def transfer makes those comic-book colours hum with vibrancy: StudioCanal have treated *Evil Dead II* with the respect it deserves. **JK.**





DIDN'T COME HERE TO DIE (2010) DVD

Out Now. Second Sight. Certificate: 18

Sophia, the leader of a group of young volunteers explains why they're out in the middle of nowhere 50 miles from the nearest sign of civilisation with no cell reception. They are creating a campsite for underprivileged youth on land that has been donated by the family of a girl who was murdered last year. As one of them remarks, "Pretty good idea for a

horror movie." Oh, smugness! Writer-director Bradley Scott Sullivan could have gone all out and have another respond, "Trailblazing", in keeping with the camp theme and his own slippery grasp of originality.

Beginning gamely enough with a cop stumbling upon a dead body in the road and a screaming, eyeless girl roaming through the forest, the narrative flashes back to how the 'pretty good idea' of a group of aimless teenagers in the wilderness ended up as this. To distinguish between their indistinct characters, each member gives some brief campfire exposition of who they are and why they aspire to Baden-Powell altruism: one of them, Chris, has come to get laid, another figures it's better than staying at home. The graduate youth of today. And then there's Daniel, who's come to get away from it all, as everyone he seems to befriend dies on him. He is certainly well cast, the actor possessing the charisma equivalence of a black hole.

Things begin to get out of control at a point of realisation that *I Didn't Come Here To Die* is a possible request from viewer to filmmaker. This is approximately when Sophia bites her lip longingly after being offered a nightcap by Danny: his tales of woe give her a most unnatural horn. Temperance should be observed on this Christian expedition. Shamefully, the others are getting sloshed by the fire, and the biting insult of 'mum-butt' causes straight-laced Miranda to have a most unnatural tantrum, resulting in her spearing an eye on a wayward branch.

So Sophia has to take her to hospital leaving Danny in charge, and, before one can sensibly ask why such youngsters are operating chainsaws without adult supervision, accidents begin waiting to happen. To add further novelty, an apparition crops up wearing a scary gas mask and Chris limps around with an axe shouting, "Danny!", possibly hoping to find a seductive woman in a hotel room bath. And there's a pretty good idea of a policeman happening to pull Danny over that happens to know him, happening to have had a childhood crush on his late mother. Blaze that trail.

Cheaply shot with an ashen filter that's as enervating as sitting through the film, *I Didn't Come Here To Die* reaches a conclusion as Daniel howls to the heavens, "How long is this gonna keep happening?" Depends how many more aspiring filmmakers think that cursory ingredients like grad students, backwoods location and lazy coincidence constitute a pretty good idea.

Extras: None. JK.



THE HUNT (2012) DVD

Out Now. Arrow.

Certificate: 15.

Demonic children have flourished in horror cinema's fiendish playground. Damien Thorn, *Pet Sematary's* Gage Creed, the Aryan moppets that inhabit *Village Of The Damned*: there is something so basely horrifying of fresh-faced innocence perverted and consciously perverting. And yet infanticide is (rightly so) such a taboo that, no matter how evil or ruinous the juvenile's conduct, the necessary measure to ensure one's survival is unthinkable: the image

of the shot child in the Spanish classic *Who Can Kill A Child?* is forever shockingly abject. *The Hunt*, a Danish psychological thriller, may not portray its young as literal little monsters, but is powerfully unsettling in the destructive influence caused by naïve insinuation.

Lucas (Mads Mikkelsen, who played Le Chiffre in *Casino Royale*) is a nursery worker in a small community, living alone and fighting for custody of his devoted teenage son.

He is idolised by Klara, the young daughter of his best friend: after he tells her off for inappropriately kissing him on the lips, she speaks to the head of the school and petulantly accuses him of sexually abusing her. As gossip spreads insidiously through the town, it becomes alleged that Lucas is a serial molester as more children come forward with damaging claims.

If *The Hunt* seems a little schematic at times (when Lucas is officially cleared, the locals take the law into their own hands with various methods of intimidation including rocks through windows), it is elevated by glacially autumnal photography, cautiously ambiguous performances, especially by Annika Wedderkopp as Klara, and prolonged sequences of controlled tension: a confrontation between Lucas and the disapproving employees of a supermarket brims with unpredictable violence, Mikkelsen's dignity defiant but worrying. But what really disturbs is the film's dark cynicism regarding human behaviour.

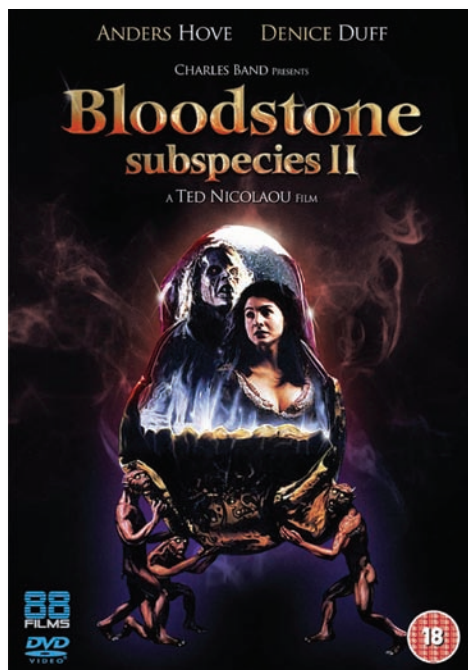
Directed by Thomas Vinterberg, one of the Dogme '95 enfants terribles who made the noisome black comedy *Festen*, he mercilessly delineates the way that adult rhetoric fans the flame of intimidation to devastating inferno. A child psychologist steers Klara with questions designed to affirm pre-determined assumption. Someone decides that nightmares are a symptom of abuse: children come forth with descriptions of Lucas's basement despite the fact that he doesn't have one, doubtless put into their minds by the parents luridly mutating the teacher into a Fritzl-style beast. Instead of looking out for their children, they are wishing the worst on them.

But the kids themselves are hauntingly ambivalent in their actions, any interaction with them potentially dangerous. As the film notes, it is supposed that children tell the truth, but they are constantly embroiled, and encouraged, in fantasy and play-acting.

Can Klara be blamed for her fancy? Did she do it with malice? When, towards the end of the drama, Klara sleepily mistakes the silhouette of her father for Lucas, she apologises: "It wasn't meant to happen." Given the circumstance, of him coming to tuck her in, how will this be taken? Innocent behaviour becomes loaded with inadvertent suggestion. Likewise, when the camera discreetly observes a child doing a 'number two', is the audience guilty for not averting their eyes?

The Hunt is an oblique addition to the 'evil offspring' genre. Like demons, they are not to be blithely trusted and feared. Like children, they should be taken seriously and protected. There are no easy answers: Vinterberg has created a troubling, subversive film.

Extras: Trailer. JK.



**SUBSPECIES/
BLOODSTONE:
SUBSPECIES II
(1991/1993) Blu-ray
and DVD**

Out Now.

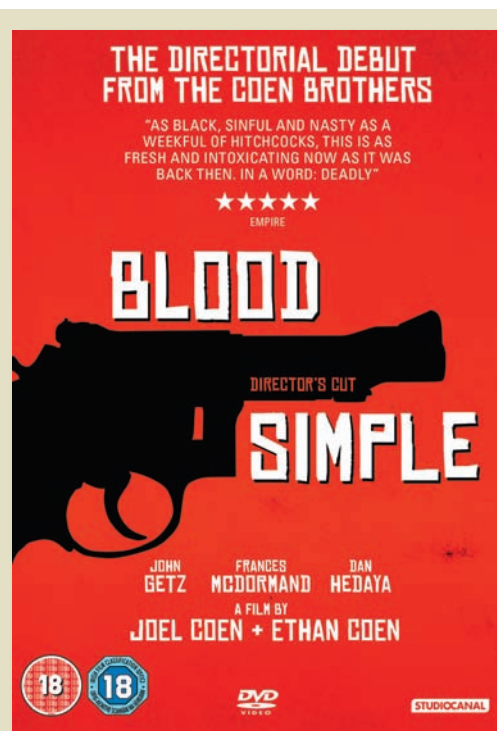
88 Films.

Certificate: 18.

These days, we need another vampire film like we do a hole in the neck. As the bloodsuckers have become increasingly colonised by American conservatism to end up as insipid, pasty-faced teenagers or slaughtered ghouls to increase the stature of historic presidents, it is refreshing to revisit the roots of the genre with

Full Moon's *Subspecies* series. Set entirely in Romania, there are no cardboard castles creaking on a Burbank backlot: the production was shot on eerily authentic location in Transylvania. *Subspecies* opens with King Vladislav (Angus Scrimm), an old, poodle-haired aristo licking some blood from a light bulb. It turns out that this is the bloodstone, a vampire narcotic containing the fluid of saints that provides enough satiation to not need living prey. The king is visited by his son Radu (Anders Hove), a gaunt figure with fingers like dripping wax. He has come to usurp inheritance of the family estate and claim the stone as his own: having over-indulged in it over the past few centuries, his thirst for blood is now unquenchable. When three PhD students researching local legends move to the area, Radu sets his fangs on making them his brides. However, his half-brother Stefan has also come back to stop the Vladislav name from becoming synonymous with Dracul, and him and Radu find themselves fighting not only for the bloodstone, but the heart of one of the girls, Michelle (Laura Tate). Whilst the story is not going to set a sunlit bloodsucker alight, there is an absorption in Transylvanian mythology that provides interest, both from a folkloric perspective, in the sense that traditionally vampires were not mere parasites and crucial in aiding the peasants to defend the region against the Turks, and visual one: the action is set around a three day festival celebrating this history which provides local colour to the more formulaic, if not enjoyable, Gothickery on display. This being a Charles Band production, there are of course little blood demons munching around, loyal to their master Radu, and, for his undead part, he is like the Crow bitten by Nosferatu: at one point, the shadow of his spindly fingers stretches across the wall to stroke the face of one of the sleeping students. This Expressionist nod becomes very keen in the sequel courtesy of Vlad Paunescu's strident photography, with Radu's silhouette suddenly growing to swallow an entire building, or fleeting across the landscape, as the evil sibling follows the bitten Michelle (now Denice Duff) to Bucharest to reclaim the bloodstone that she's stolen. *Subspecies II* is the better of the films with some neat effects - tendons, veins and then spine crawl out of Radu's neck to reattach his head to its rightful shoulders - and the introduction of Ma Vladislav, a malevolent mummy that looks like a desiccated Cenobite: the scene in which her son comes to ask her for relationship advice regarding Michelle, is deliciously warped. These authentic Transylvanian vampires may since have become the subspecies to their alpha-airbrushed American counterparts, but they provide far more ghastly fun.

Extras: For *Subspecies* there is a contemporary making-of, with director Ted Nicolau complaining about Hove's regularly drunken tantrums, and commentary with Band, who is full of anecdotes and arrogance: "I was the pioneer, the first American director shooting movies in Romania." With the sequel, there's an archival *Videozone* featurette on the production and commentary with Nicolau, Duff and Hove, both focusing on the trials of filming in a former Soviet country. The image is clean and glossy on both discs: these are purchases worth baring your neck for. **JK.**



**BLOOD
SIMPLE (1984)
DVD**

Out Now.

StudioCanal.

Certificate: 18

"The world is full of complainists. But the fact is, nothing comes with a guarantee."

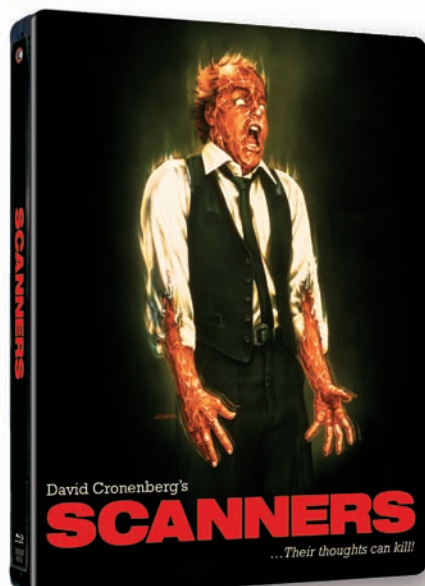
Thus begins the Coen brothers' career, spoken in trademark voiceover by sweaty Texan PI Loren Visser (M. Emmet Walsh). He is working for one hell of a restless complainist,

juke-joint owner Marty (Dan Hedaya), who's moaning about his wife's suspected infidelity with one of his employees. Tailing them in his VW beetle to a motel room, the detective takes photographs justifying the complaint, Abby (Frances McDormand) lying in sin with Ray (John Getz). When her decision to leave him brings on further whinge, Marty offers Visser \$10,000 to off them both. But, as the man warned, there's no guarantee of a problem simply solved, and the Coens concoct a series of double-crosses like a diabolic game of *Kerplunk*, teasingly extracting them until the action ruefully implodes through the villainy and chicanery of its players. What is remarkable about *Blood Simple* is the sheer assurance behind Joel and Ethan Coen's individual take on the crime thriller, for this is film noir skewered in the gutter. Cicadas perpetually ribbit poison into the heat of the night as ceiling fans struggle to cut through the sweaty air of mistrust. Walsh has never been better, wheezing guile and satanic charisma into his corrupt Stetson-wearing slob: "Give me a call when you want to cut off my head," he purrs to Marty, glint in his eye. "I can always crawl around without it." Hedaya is a bundle of venal nerves, palpitating with hypocrisy: further proof of his distinctive skill as a support player. If it's the bad guys that steal the show, the other two actors flesh out their characters with bruised dignity, Getz a weebegone fall guy and McDormand moving from modest victim to accidental femme fatale.

What have come to be known as Coen trademarks are fully evident in their first feature. Wise-cracking dialogue packed with ironic repetition: both Marty and Ray state that they "ain't no marriage counsellor", trying to shirk responsibility for Abby's decision. Idiosyncratic humour: in Vissen's dark room as he's mocking up the snap of the bullet-riddled lovers, there are a whole line of photographs of his beetle hung up behind him. Stylistic flourishes with macabre suggestion: a close-up of someone pressing an answer-phone button cuts to a finger being pushed into the bloodied hole in the back seat of a car. And plain head-scratching oddness, the final frames loaded with wistful contemplation.

For those complainists, myself included, who bemoan that the Coens have lost their way somewhat in the last decade (*The Ladykillers*? *GAMBIT*?!), it would be wise to remember Visser's drawl that nothing comes with a guarantee. But *Blood Simple* is such a striking debut, it pays enough weight in gnarly flesh to forget the brothers' later shortcomings.

Extras: Tongue-in-cheek trailer for the theatrical release of their *Director's Cut*, presented here, which tidied up scenes and resolved problems with music rights. Considering that this release marks the UK DVD premiere, it's a pity that there's nothing else. **JK.**



**SCANNERS (1981) Blu-ray and DVD
Out Now. Second Sight. Certificate: 18.**

A head exploding spectacularly like a pregnant balloon, the splatter equivalent of the big bang. A vein-bulging, eye-popping, apocalyptic mental duel, equal parts mortal agony and grotesque animalism. These two iconic sequences bookend *Scanners*, David Cronenberg's first major box office success, and are certainly magnificent. For what lies between, it must be said that the film is one of the director's least involving works, never reaching its potential, and not fully knowing what that is.

Scanners are outcasts, psychic beings unable to shut out the constant streams of consciousness from others. Because of this, most become destitute, semi-insane misfits unless they are taught to harness their power, either by Dr. Paul Ruth (Patrick McGooohan, coasting) as part of a research project toward improving national defence by the use of telepathic espionage, or through Darryl Revok (Michael Ironside, brilliantly unholy), who heads an underground movement threatening international security by engineering a superhuman militia. Cameron Vale (Stephen Lack, definitely lacking), recently indoctrinated to Ruth's programme, is tasked to infiltrate Revok's organisation, but, naturally, the insurgent scanner has a particular interest in this new recruit.

Unlike its protagonists, *Scanners* suffers through a lack of development. Ideas fizz in its overwrought brain but rarely rise successfully to the surface. With the central idea that the first wave of scanners were the result of an experimental tranquiliser aimed at pregnant women in the late '40s, the inspiration is clearly thalidomide, except here the side effects are initially unnoticed: beyond Vale's duress at being forced to listen to the thoughts of a room of people and scruffy, homeless appearance, there is not enough of a sense of affliction for the conceit to work. Likewise, Cronenberg's notion that telepathy is not mere mind-reading, but the "direct linking of two nervous systems" is a strong one, helped visually by seamless face-wipes between scanner and scanned, but becomes half-baked when Vale needs to connect with



the mainframe of a computer: there is no discernible difference than coupling with a human mind, disappointing for a director who has elsewhere explored man's assimilation with technology. But, like a head, we do get to see a machine room blown up.

Explosions, car crashes, stuntmen flung about willy-nilly: there are concessions to action cinema aplenty. In Cronenberg's defence, the script was written as they were shooting, generic scenes doubtless conceived to buy time. Maybe the subtlety was infectious, Vale meeting a scanner inside a giant plaster head, possibly the most clumsily literal statement in the director's oeuvre.

Beyond the make-up effects headed by Chris Walas, Tom Schwartz and Dick Smith, there is no faulting the various

departments: Howard Shore's score is electronically dystopian, Mark Irwin's cinematography quietly lurid, and the sound design shrewdly abstract, Vale's amphibian rumble whilst scanning in smart contrast to Revok's carnivorous growls. If nowhere near the sum of its parts, *Scanners* fortuitously made Cronenberg a household name. One synonymous with blowing the mind.

Extras: Generous interviews with Lack, Irwin, make-up artist Stephan Dupuis, villainous actor Lawrence Dane and, most candidly, producer Pierre David, who entertainingly raves about the chaos of the shoot and the precious temperaments of McGooohan and female star Jennifer O'Neill. Unsurprisingly, the common talking point is the exploding head. Now in glorious high-definition! **JK.**



LES COUSINS (1959) DVD/Blu-ray

Out Now.

Eureka!

Certificate: TBC.

Claude Chabrol was known as the French Hitchcock for his jet-black thrillers laced with pessimism, especially toward the middle class, and sequences of quiet suspense and ironic murder: films like *Les Biches* (1968), with its bisexual love triangle, and *Le Boucher* (1970), which examines the suspicions toward a small-town butcher after a number of

women fall victim to an unknown killer. Eureka! have released Chabrol's first two films on Blu-Ray, *Le Beau Serge* (1958), clearly inspired by Hitch's *Shadow Of A Doubt* and considered the first example of the French New Wave, and *Les Cousins*, made straight after, in which the director really began to explore his thematic concerns.

Charles (G rard Blain) is a spoilt mother's boy from the country who has come to stay with his cousin Paul (Jean-Claude Brialy) in Paris to read law. Paul is a gregarious loafer, prone to finding any excuse, usually involving women and alcohol, to avoid study. Charles initially finds Paul's decadent lifestyle alluring, but soon falls foul of his cousin's monstrous ego when Paul ruthlessly co-opts Florence, the girl that he has fallen in love with. Deciding to throw himself into assiduous preparation for their upcoming exams, Charles cannot help but be distracted by the living arrangement and his relative's spontaneous orgies: the final, stinging straw comes when Paul passes and he flunks, leading to confused recrimination.

Les Cousins is a trenchant, sophisticated study of provincial naivety and metropolitan cynicism, of self-centred ambition and destructive complacency. The casting is astute: reversing their good/bad guy roles from *Le Beau Serge*, Blain is a touch too oafish to warrant full sympathy and Brialy far too charismatic to be condemned as villain. But he is a dubious influence, fuelled by his 'gentleman friend' Clovis, a sinister, insidious figure: after Paul sneers at Florence's aspirations for a relationship with Charles as ending in bourgeois mediocrity, Clovis conveniently enters the room and finishes the assassination, snidely coercing her into an embrace with Paul ("You were born to be stroked, not for matters of the mind") that will ultimately seal his cousin's fate. There is more than a whiff of the urbane killers from *Rope*, with Clovis as the John Dall character.

What follows is nothing but tense, as Charles and Florence find themselves imprisoned in Paul's nocturnal flat, her looking nervously at his bookish silhouette as she dances with Paul, him later tormented by their antics in the adjoining shower as he tries to do work. It is in this sequence that Chabrol disarmingly cuts to Florence asking Paul what the word 'sycophant' means, before going back to an edgy Charles, revealing the director's contempt for this servile bourgeois milieu. Everyone spinelessly panders to another: Paul to Clovis, Florence to Paul, Charles to his mother and in awe of his cousin. During one of Paul's parties, Chabrol briefly takes his camera outside as if observing them behind the glass in a reptile house, their revelry heard as metallic and dim. *Les Cousins* heralded Chabrol's signature obsessions, layering them over stylistic homage. It is during the final sequence that he distills the essence of his prime influence, with premeditated camera movements delaying violent action and soundtrack swelling with worry before the whole affair plunges into an abyss, devastating in its mordancy. The French Hitchcock, a name well deserved.

Extras: Rigorous making-of, with added treat of Chabrol discussing key sequences; The Man Who Sold The Eiffel Tower, the director's 1964 short for a portmanteau film about true swindles, which is a breezy, cartoonish skit with a nevertheless cruel streak; Lengthy, eclectic booklet. An excellent package, matching the quality of restoration. **JK.**



THE INSIDE (2012) DVD

Out Now.

Monster Pictures.

Certificate: 18

A number of horror films have begun recently with worrying statistics, usually relating to the volume of people that inexplicably disappear each day/week/year. With few exceptions, this is mere audience gimmick ('real life's scarier than fiction don't you know?') as opposed to genuine starting point, for what genre film does not involve people going missing? In this Irish found-footage, the legend is

burnt on screen that 50% of all witnessed crimes go unreported, an indictment perhaps of our collective apathy.

For Corinna's birthday, her friends have clubbed together and bought her a camera, which she can have at the end of the night after they've filmed the drunken hi-jinks. But before they hit Dublin's nightlife, they decide to take her to an abandoned lock-up for vodka shots and embarrassing story swaps. What a way to celebrate. Especially when three homeless guys break into this potential doss-house and decide to have a game of spin the bottle with the ladies, chastity as the forfeit. As it reaches agonising climax, the gang rape is interrupted by the sound of a baby wailing: the lights go out, a bank of televisions come on displaying static, and people go missing. Forever. The resulting DV tape, watched by a bloke who has picked the camera up in a pawnshop, is shocking testament to a cannibalistic evil prowling on all intruders that enter its lair. Director Eoin Macken has crafted a visceral, nasty, terrifying experience. As far as the found footage goes. The introduction of the semi-feral, foul-mouthed hooligans is a sustained assault to sensibility, *Man Bites Dog* with gob and tracksuits. Long takes offer no respite to the torment, which is profoundly horrific as the assailants are egged on by the presence of the camera, using it to shoot an unrelenting beating in 'glorious' close-up, or finger-swabbing one of the girl's mouths with another's blood whilst delivering saucy commentary track. "We're makin' a movie," leers one in thick burr. "Loike Spoilberg."

When realist terror is replaced by abstract horror, the film changes scare tactics to disorientate and show as little as possible. There is nothing to ground us for reassurance: as the camera ventures further into the labyrinthine building, passed almost as a relay between the short-lived survivors, there is no sense of what the space is, seeming to shift between warehouse, school, scene dock, and subterranean dungeon that bleeds with darkness on either side. The creature appears suddenly, transfixing victims: as the camera whips back and forth trying to comprehend, the blood-streaked thing looms ever larger in almost still imagery, denied fluid context and reduced to stroboscopic excerpts of glimpsed dread. In contrast to this heart-stopping frenzy, each manifestation is presaged by an ominous rumble, like the sound of a distant train thrumming on the rails, inching those raised hairs ever further.

And then, rather spectacularly, Macken fucks it up. After watching the end of the tape, the gentleman decides to use clues in the footage to pinpoint the location of the lock-up. Not to pass on to the garda, but to investigate himself. Yes, go into a den with potential rapists and a demonic entity lurking around. On his own. Without telling anyone. With only a torch for defence. Why? To prove a point about what happens to people when they don't report grisly goings-on? Whatever the reason, this is a moronic leap of faith.

Collective apathy be damned: once you have respite from the found footage, don't bother to register the silly ending.

Extras: Making-of expanding upon the fantastic location; Detailed commentary with Macken and producer Emmett J. Scanlan. **JK.**



KNIGHTRIDERS (1981) DVD/Blu-ray Out Now. Arrow Films. Certificate: 15.

Fight Or Yield. A potential revolutionary statement. Defiance against 'the man', that crass, corporate schmuck who wants to commodify everything. This is the name of the troupe of knights led by chivalrous Sir William, or Billy for short. Their steeds run not on hay but gasoline, their armour a combination of papier-mâché and motorcycle leathers. They travel across America with a bespoke medieval pageant, the centrepiece of which is a series of duels, either solo bike joust-offs or hand-to-hand combat on speeding sidecar chariots.

But a schism is forming amongst this group of excitable LARPerS. There are those that feel that Billy's outlook, of codes, conduct and spiritual devotion to the freedom of make-believe, is naïve, especially when there is money to be made from their growing reputation, with offers all over for commercial representation.

Made just after *Dawn Of The Dead*, George A. Romero's sly, anti-consumerist masterpiece, and using many of his stock repertory of actors (plus Stephen King in a goofy cameo), *Knightriders* is an overlong, unsubtle piece of whimsy. Earnestly played by Ed Harris in his first feature role, Billy is an idealistic man-child



himself in public by bearing the brunt of its blow. Sir William arrogantly refuses to sign his centrefold image in a tawdry motorbike magazine for a young fan because it ain't what he's all about, man. "I'm not trying to be a hero! I'm fighting the dragon!" he exclaims later: get that man a colander to use as helmet.

And what about the forces of capitalism that threaten his order? There's an obese cop who demands backhanders from these 'troublemakers', a sleazy Vegas showman who wants them to sign their lives away, and a slobby, pizza-huffing photographer for a network TV channel. Sure enough, a splinter group forms led by Morgan (Tom Savini, effectively reprising his role from the earlier

and self-righteous bore. Despite suffering from a prior injury, he nevertheless takes to the saddle to teach his citizens bullish lessons: instead of simply vetoing a mace made from heavy rubber, he martyrs

film), but after semi-pornographic promo shoots (like, sex sells, yeah) and booze-driven hotel room trashings (like, major label rock 'n' roll excess, yeah), they realise the error of their greedy ways and drive back to camp in pimped-up bikes like white porcupines, paid for by the 'man'. Stick it to him, yeah.

Knightriders is overblown cartoon satire with no teeth. When Hell's Angels gatecrash the festivities to cause destruction, one initially cannot help but think of Altamont: nope, it's just an excuse to have more men fighting on bikes. A gross crowd baying when country music replaces medieval instrumental on the PA seems to be inspired by Peckinpah's elegiac rodeo-Western *Junior Bonner*, but has none of that film's delicacy or disillusion. Instead, what Romero leaves us with is sentimental countercultural fantasy, Billy's troupe replete with folkies, hipsters, homos, tomboys and people who dig that it ain't about adhering to rules but stayin' alive, man.

Fight or yield? When the result is as transparent and broad-stroked as this, I'd say the 'man' can have it.

Extras: Despite my dislike for the film, Arrow and High Rising have done a good job. Entertaining interviews with the venerable Harris, actress Patricia Tallman and Savini, who recounts singing musical numbers from *Camelot* in a diner with Doug Bradley; Commentary from 2001 with the director, his wife Christine, Savini and John Amplas, which is rambling and good-natured in its reminiscence of a sort of Romero 'family' on the shoot. **JK.**

SHORT NOTICES



MAXIMUM CONVICTION (2012) DVD

Out Now. StudioCanal. Certificate: 18.

"No pain, no game." Defining words for the careers of two Stevens, Seagal and 'Stone Cold' Austin. Produced by the former and scripted by the latter, here they tag team as an ex-Special Forces (natch) freelancer and good-guy muscle-for-hire respectively, brought in to supervise the removal of sensitive prisoners from a maximum-security prison's closing-down sale. But an armed band of mercenaries plan to 'extract one of the assets', the lingo of intel operatives and wrestler screenwriters, whatever the cost. So there's a flurry of fisticuffs, fair-to-middling machine-gun fire, and a light drizzle of one-liners. The action carries minimal conviction, poorly executed and edited, so that it's rarely clear who's decking who and with what limb. Seagal, with widow's peak and jowly mumble, is showing his age, but gives it his all, as does Austin. "It ain't over till we're

dead," Seagal growls at the end, promising a rematch. Maximum Conviction shows little pain, but its stars are at least still game. JK.

THREE STEPS TO THE GALLOWS (1953) DVD

Out Now. Renown Pictures. Certificate: PG.

Four double crosses, three steps to the gallows, two framings for murder, and not one single person to trust. In this knotty narrative, American Greg Stevens (Scott Brady) takes a few days of British shore leave to catch up with his brother only to find that he's going to be hung for murder in a few days. The pressure is on for Greg to clear his name, but the smuggling ring involved is rather devious when it comes to covering their dirty pawprints. Directed by the ever-dependable John Gilling, this B-thriller becomes brisk entertainment once it hits its stride. Memorable characters- a cheekily chipper boxer, club owner smarmed in venom- jostle in atmospheric location (the cat-and-mouse finale at a packed trade fair in Olympia is deftly done) as the tale of maligned reputation slithers into a vortex of suspicion. After Three Steps To The Gallows, you won't want to trust anyone again. JK.



SCANNERS II: THE NEW ORDER (1991)

Blu-ray and DVD

Out Now. Second Sight. Certificate: 18.

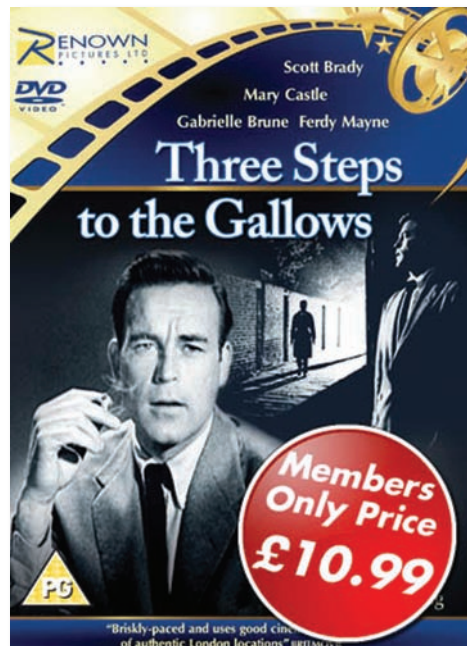
The first sequel to *Scanners* is coy in some respects: it's not until about 90 minutes in that a mind catastrophically boggles. Attempting to continue the mythology of the original, it cannibalises from another of the Cronenberg catalogue, with its tale of a man using his clairvoyancy to predict the tyrannical reign of a political aspirant, in this case a power-crazed police officer, thereby compelled to halt his campaign: The New Order has got a touch of *The Dead Zone*. There are some reasonable additions alongside the gaudy '80s feel, most notably with nemesis scanner Drak (Raoul Trujillo), a feral, psychotic beast: hearing endless voices, he furiously smashes a line of female mannequins in a gloom-saturated warehouse, a psychic Maniac. But the film mainly squanders originality for obvious, and forced, staples: a parent/scanner-child confrontation leads not into a dialogue about the morality of experimental drug-taking through pregnancy, but a dull revelation that he's Cameron Vale's son. And there are endless nosebleeds,



SEEDPEOPLE (1992) DVD

Out Now. 88 Films. Certificate: 15.

You're kind of asking for extraterrestrial trouble in a place called Comet Valley. Told in twist-beckoning flashback, this is a story about how the good folk of this mid-Western community played host to some horticultural pod people, and the efforts of a meteorologist and mad scientist to rid the place of these Martian pests. A Full Moon fusion of evil plant movie and demonic critter feature, this is time-passing fun with some imaginative design. Those who come into contact with the germinating husks are sprayed with an icky substance resembling human seed before becoming dispassionate monotone-zombies encasing giant insect-like nasties: the orang-u-tan-vampire-bat-tumbleweed crossbreed is certainly worthy of the question, "What the ding-dong heck of a doodle hell is that?" A fittingly eccentric one for this Percy Thrower meets *Invasion Of The Body Snatchers* variety.



His name may sound like ketchup - and in some ways it is entirely fitting because best-selling novelist Jack Ketchum has been spreading the red for decades. The Dark Side catches up with the man Stephen King has dubbed to be the most terrifying horror writer in the world...

KETCHUM'S CREEPS

B

orn as Dallas Mayr in 1946, horror author Jack Ketchum may not be as well known as Clive Barker or Stephen King but there is no denying the novelist's notoriety and his phenomenal run of commercial success. Indeed,

beginning with 1980's *Off Season*, Ketchum has embraced a nonstop stream of notoriety – and controversy has never been far behind. After all, his original publisher (Ballantine) refused to print his follow-up novel *Ladies' Night* after his debut attracted some unfavourable feedback – with some critics choosing to castigate its graphic depictions of torture, sexual abuse and bloodletting. On the other hand, there are others who have hailed the likes of *Right to Life* (1999) and *Closing Time* (2003) as modern macabre masterworks in the field of fear-fiction. Moreover, some of Ketchum's other work has made it onto the big screen - most famously *The Lost* (published 2001, film 2006), *The Girl Next Door* (published 1989, film 2007) and *Red* (published 2002, film 2008). When Ketchum's latest adaptation, *The Woman*, which was directed by Lucky McKee, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, its torrid tale of a captive female who is tormented and sexually abused caused at least one very vocal walkout (check youtube if you are curious).

Yet, speaking to Ketchum and one gets the impression he would not have it any other way. Besides, Stephen King has hyped the author up as one of the finest genre writers on the planet and you can hardly argue with that. No doubt such patronage was beneficial in turning Ketchum from a cult favourite into a world renowned, best-selling author - the recipient of numerous Bram Stoker awards and now the subject of a *Dark Side* interview...

How do you feel about the film adaptations of your work? Are you generally happy with *The Woman*, *Red*, *The Lost* and *The Girl Next Door*?

Yeah, I like 'em. They're all very different types of films but they have in common a full understanding and respect for the source material, good solid scripting, and good hard work by energetic and talented cast and crews. Plus they give me the heebie-jeebies [laughs].

How involved have you been in the film adaptations of your work?

I see the scripts in the early stages, give comments - many of which seem to have made their way into the finished products - and then repeated the process later on. I spent a good deal of time on-set with *The Girl Next Door*, since the shooting was nearby in New Jersey and I did a walk-on part as a carnny that got cut down to a 'blink and you'll miss me' cameo but it was still fun to do.

My understanding has generally been that writers are persona non grata on movie sets so

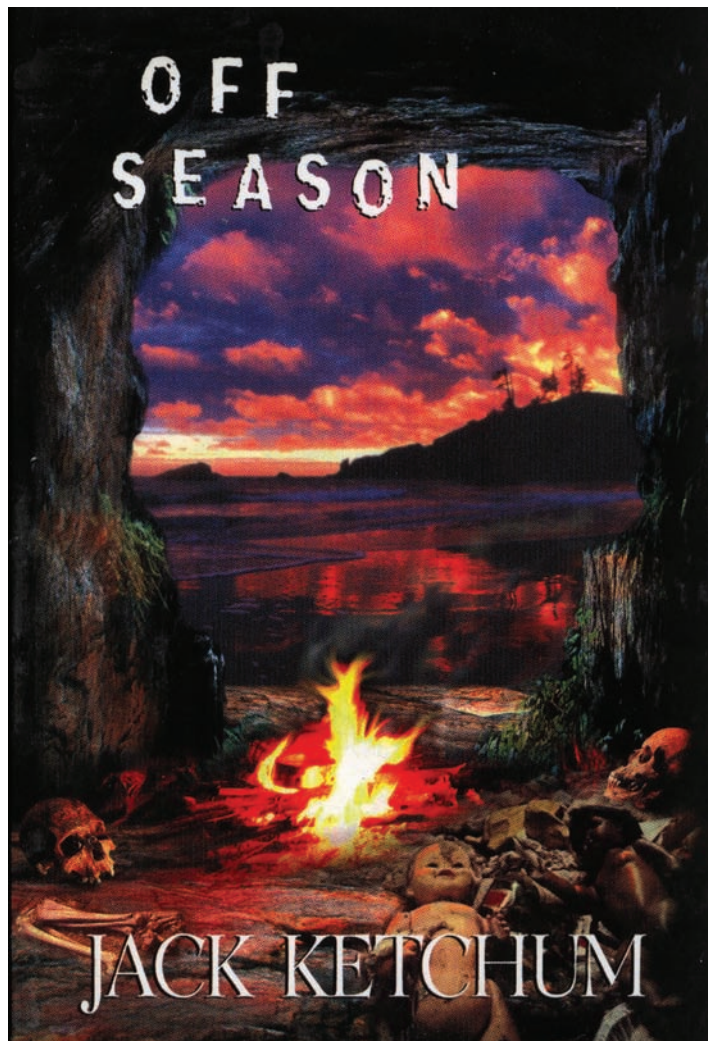
it is nice to be proven otherwise. I've also been helping to promote the films at conventions and festivals, which has been great.

One of your most acclaimed works is *Hide and Seek* - will we see it made into film form anytime soon?

I'd love to see that happen. It was actually optioned twice in the early nineties but both options have long since lapsed. Are they any producers out there reading this? If so, my advice is to pounce now [laughs].

Is it true that after *Off Season* your publisher was scared to handle *Hide and Seek*?

Okay - here is what happened with that. I was contracted for another novel after *Off Season* which became *Ladies' Night*. It was supposed to be my *Salem's Lot* to *Off Season*'s *Carrie*, if that makes sense [laughs]. It was going to be very visceral, like *Off Season*, but on a much bigger scale. I outlined massively for the publisher - which I will never do again because it is way too inhibiting for me - and delivered exactly what I had outlined. But by then the shit had hit the fan with *Off Season* and they, um, declined to publish it and wanted their advance back. Jack Scovil, my agent at the time and a very good one, pointed out to them that since they had gotten just what they ordered they owed me the acceptance money whether they published the book or not. Ultimately, we compromised. I agreed that the rights to *Ladies' Night* would revert back to me and I would



write them a third book of a somewhat less ferocious nature, which turned out to be *Hide and Seek*. And which they promptly buried with a tiny print run. Years later I cut the fat from *Ladies Night* and it turned out to be a tight little nasty book. So everything worked out in the end [laughs].

How do you feel about the accusations of misogyny in your work?

Well, nobody has ever accused me of that to my face or even in print... at least as far as I know...

To be fair, I think you got quite a lot of it when *The Girl Next Door* came out...

Okay, sure, maybe with the exception of some of the reviews for that film but I have never responded to that or answered these accusations...

You could of course start here...

I guess I would only say that if you did a head-count you would probably find I have mangled as many guys as women in my stories [laughs]. I can also say that I like women. And I can prove that.

Nevertheless, women are often the subject of violence - domestic or otherwise - in your work. Is this difficult to write about?

All violence is difficult to write about if you want to be responsible about it, and I do. Personally, I find the most difficult to write about to be animal cruelty but that is just me.

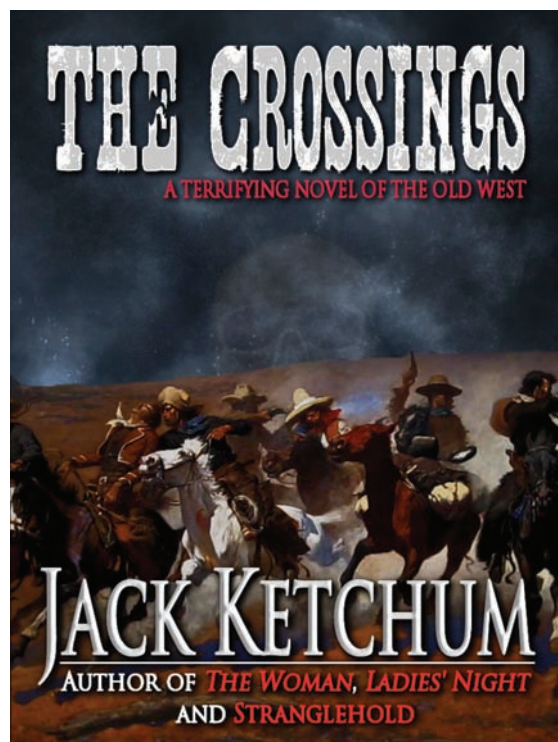
Do you do much research into domestic violence or anything before approaching the subject?

Sure - I mean, I try to be accurate, both physically and in terms of the law. For instance, I did a lot of research for my book *Only Child* which is also known as *Stranglehold*. I had to look at the New Hampshire statutes concerning child abuse and domestic violence, because the events in the novel are based on events which occurred in Texas and the laws are somewhat different there...

What scares Jack Ketchum?

Some years ago a guy called Jeff Gelb asked a bunch of us horror types to write a story for an anthology called *Fear Itself*, the premise being, don't write about what you think will scare the other guy, write about what scares you in particular. I figuratively raised my hand and said, "anybody doing snakes yet?" He said no so I wrote about that and if you read the story *Snakes*, which is in the collection *Peaceable Kingdom*, you will figure out why. It is based on a bunch of linked-together true stories, some of which happened to me, others to a lady friend of mine. Other than that, I would say that every time I am writing I am writing to scare myself first. So that list is a pretty long one. And other than snakes it is mostly other people that frighten me.

When you begin on a new novel - right up until you finish it - can you describe the process?



Every day when I begin writing I rewrite what I have done the previous day. Then I go on to the new stuff. That way I not only stay focused on the story, and the style of storytelling, but when I am finished I have got a first draft instead of a rough, which makes revision that much easier...



Above:
The Woman
could do with
a few lessons
in personal
hygiene...



What was it about the Sylvia Likens case that inspired you to write *The Girl Next Door*?

A number of things interested me thematically. First of all it was a series of violent crimes perpetrated primarily by a woman against a woman and that is something you do not hear of very often. Then there was the "open secret" aspect, in that the neighbors either turned a blind eye to what was going on or else they actually joined in. There was the notion that Sylvia was taking this on this awful burden herself in order to protect her little sister. Finally I guess there were the photos: Sylvia's open happy smile and Gertrude's empty,



pinched face - and almost Walker Evans-like thousand-yard stare... It was haunting.

Can you talk a little about using real life events for influence?

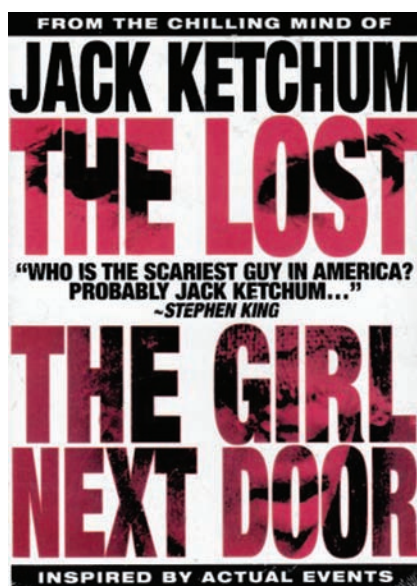
You know, I am a lousy plotter. It is my weakest suit as a writer. So I let life make up my stories for me - but I also like using real events, whether they are events that have happened to me or to others, because they tend to keep me honest. I do not want to betray the real story so my own story follows its basic trajectory. And they keep me honest in another way - it is easier to draw a believable character in fiction if you are



basing it on a real person -- at least it is for me.

Why did you use the Manson murders as an inspiration to the finale of *The Lost*?

Listen - the character of Ray Pye in *The Lost* uses the Manson murders as an inspiration. It is *the character* - and not me. I mean, course it is me writing it - but in this story Ray has just heard about these events and they're taking hold and whizzing around in that twisted brain of his. He's also just heard about Woodstock but that doesn't particularly turn him on. The Manson reference is a character detail which spins into a plot detail. Which I



think is exactly as it should be.

Stephen King sang your praises quite early on. That must have been quite a confidence booster!

Yeah, Steve has been giving me a firm helping hand in public since I did *Joyride*. That was when I had the temerity to write to him and ask if he might read the thing [laughs]. To my surprise he wrote back and gave me a nice blurb that delivered me from 40,000-copy hell. He wrote back something to the effect that he had been reading me faithfully since *Off Season* and he thought he could give me a quote that would make dead men walk and blind men see. Which he then proceeded

to do. When he learned that Overlook were going to publish a limited run of *The Girl Next Door* he insisted that he write the forward - a fine long essay - without the slightest prompting from either me or the publisher. He also mentioned my book *The Crossings* at the banquet for his lifetime achievement award from the National Book Awards. Then, in *Entertainment Weekly*, he asked in his column, "who's the scariest man in America? Probably Jack Ketchum..." and it went on from there... Wow!

How did you react to all of this?

How did I read? I can only tell you that I am clearly still capable of being stunned [laughs]. Though having gotten to know him now I am not exactly surprised - either by his generosity or his open-heartedness. He is one of the nicest guys I know, and one hell of a writer.

Have you also been influenced by King?

You bet. His mix of horror and human tenderness has, I hope, rubbed off on me big time.

In a similar vein, do you ever speculate upon why you have been successful?

Well, happily, the feedback I get most often from my readers tends to focus on the characters which I write. That is also the sort of feedback that I am after. Peter Straub once told me he thought that readers probably come to me for the wrong reasons - by that he meant the 'notorious' graphic violence - and stay for the right ones. So I'll go with that [laughs].

Do you think you have exploited the market for graphically brutal horror?

I think with *Off Season* I saw that, yes, there was niche for that sort of in-your-face violence I touched upon earlier. But since then I write what I want and people seem to be willing to travel along with me. Can you hear me knocking on wood here? [Laughs]

Here's one for the budding writers reading this interview - how did you first get published and how easy was it?

It was easier than for most, since I was an agent for three and a half years before I began writing full time, so I knew a lot of magazine and book editors and knew what they were looking for. Also - the climate at that time was very different. You could write real stories for the men's magazines and so long as they had some sex angle in there. Everybody wanted to be the next *Playboy* back then, so real fiction was encouraged - and rock 'n roll writing was in its heyday. With my first record review, I asked my editor Billy Altman at *Creem* magazine what he was looking for and he just smiled and said, "write lively." So I did. It was good advice.

Finally, if you had to recommend just one of your books to anyone what would it be and why?

What? You want me to rate my kids? [Laughs] I guess I could say, either read the short stories in *Peaceable Kingdom* or *Closing Time and Other Stories*, which give a kind of overview of what I do, a sampler... Or do what I like to do with a writer who is new to me and read him from the beginning and then watch him progress through time. That would mean starting with *Off Season*. Just beware the woods, man... beware the woods.

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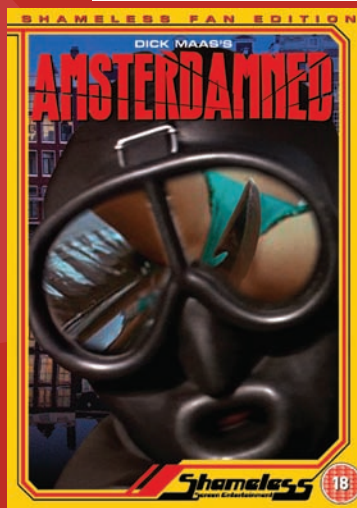
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The titles to choose from are as follows:

Amsterdam: This action-packed suspense shocker from director Dick (The Lift) Maas is about a maniac in a frogman's outfit prowling the canals of Amsterdam, leaping out to murder people at random. There are echoes of *Jaws* in the scenario and the speedboat chase finale is an action highlight. Sleek and stylish, this is a real Dutch treat!

The House On The Edge Of The Park: This sleazy shocker stars *Last House On The Left* psycho David Hess as a crazed rapist who, along with his brain-dead mate John Morghen, terrorises a group of spoiled yuppies after gate-crashing a party in a posh mansion. One rich kid is thrown into the swimming pool and when he tries to climb out Hess urinates on him. Torture, rape, lesbianism and a 9mm castration are on the menu here in a famed video nasty that is essential viewing.

Phantom Of Death: When he discovers that he is losing his hair, Michael York doesn't just go out and buy a syrup - he goes bonkers and starts killing people! The gore starts from the opening credits, with a splattery neck-slicing and a woman having her head forced through a window. Gorgeous scream queen Edwige Fenech joins the reliable Donald Pleasence, who plays a retiring cop on hand to investigate the crimes, in a stylish giallo from the director of *Cannibal Holocaust*.

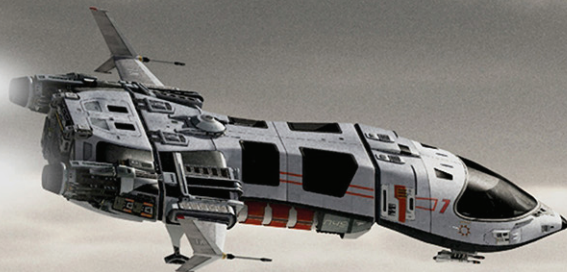
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